



## Mustang 43 sports flybridge February 2007



*Mustang Marine's newest venture – a range of luxury, sports flybridge launches to complement its existing stable of sports cruisers – got off to a flying start when it acquired Tauranga's Oliver Marine last year and shifted production across the Tasman. Lawrence Schäffler attended the launch of the first, rebranded boats.*

It was with mixed feelings that I explored the two new Mustangs – the M37 and the M43. Sad that the Oliver sale represents the passing of a New Zealand icon, but glad that its spirit lives on and, under the Mustang umbrella, will expand in a way that was never possible in Tauranga.

The newcomers are superb vessels, and perfectly fit the Mustang game plan: offering an affordable range of vessels with superior game-fishing facilities on an elegant, luxury platform.

Internationally renowned for its sports cruisers, the Australian company went through a management buyout in late 2005, and under the helm of new CEO Paul Scanlon, immediately embarked on an aggressive growth strategy. The decision to break into the sports flybridge market (through the Oliver acquisition) coincided with a drive to expand its international dealer network. Both strategies, it seems, are firing on all cylinders.

With their unmistakable Oliver heritage, the new Mustangs exhibit an easy synthesis of fishing functionality, flowing layout and cushy living. The first two models off the production line (the M37 and M43) were launched in December last year and will soon be joined by the M41 and, later this year, by the flagship M55. The M41 is based on the Oliver 390, while the M55 is modeled on the Royale 500. Mustang is also developing a new model from scratch – a 48-footer between the M43 and the M55.

Order books have filled more rapidly than expected. By December last year, six M43s and five M37s had been sold (sight unseen) with more on order. Scanlon is understandably pleased with the results: "The immediate interest in this new line of vessels highlights a need for a high-quality, competitively-priced product in this area of the market."

And it's fair to say that while the end of Oliver in New Zealand is sad, the designs can only benefit from Mustang's high-tech, production line environment and marketing/distribution infrastructure.

One of Oliver's major problems, says its former Auckland sales manager, Graeme Doak (now Mustang Marine's New Zealand representative), "was the need to spend a lot of money on tooling to be more production-oriented. But that wasn't viable – recovering that investment based on the volume of boats being built would have been impossible. Under Mustang, volumes are up and the recovery time is a lot shorter, so the company's happy to spend money developing the moulds."

### Construction

While Mustang acquired all the hull moulds for the Olivers, it has developed complementary moulds for the interiors, to build faster and more efficiently. "In Tauranga, every interior was custom-built," says Doak. "In the new build process,

the internal componentary now uses moulds. So we now have a production line environment where the hulls come out of the moulds, are trolleyed on to the production line, and the interiors and decks placed in position.”

The factory has capacity to do six of the new boats per month – two M43s, and four of either the 37s or the 41s. Ramping up production will require more build crews, and based on initial orders, this seems a likely development.

Hulls, decks, flybridges and interior components are hand laid. The hulls feature independent compartments throughout, and are equipped with an isophthalic gelcoat exterior. They also contain a layer of Kevlar (chine to chine), with vinyl ester resin in first layer of the hull, and a watertight collision bulkhead forward. All in all, it's no surprise the hulls are sold with a 10-year structural guarantee.

#### Propulsion

While Oliver traditionally fitted Cummins (and some CAT) engines to its launches, the options are likely to increase. Mustang has just signed a deal with Mercruiser, and Doak says the Volvo range will also be available.

“One of the 43s is being fitted with Volvo's IPS drives. The IPS technology performs very well on Mustang's sports cruisers, and we're all keen to see how it performs in a flybridge model – no one's ever done that before. The IPS technology is certainly easier to install, and as we don't need rudders, shaft tubes or shafts, it's probably cheaper than a conventional installation.”

While the M43 (LOA 14.39m) is a new design, it's based on the layout of the Oliver 370 and 390. There are minor modifications – most noticeable is the wider cabin (which sacrifices a little width on the side decks. I personally think this is a smart adjustment – it creates an even greater sense of volume inside the boat, and the narrower side decks are still easily negotiated.

#### Fishing in Style

'Fisho's heaven' is the best way to describe the M43's enormous cockpit. It's littered with storage lockers (including a rod cabinet), has a large, moulded live-bait tank in the transom, and a reinforced sole for a fighting chair (not yet fitted on this first model). And if game fishing's not your raison d'être for living, you can forego the chair and fit a cockpit table instead. A second live-bait tank is built into the 900mm swim platform.

The sole's covered with a thick, patterned carpet (feels great underfoot). Underneath are two hatches with gas struts (engine access and lazarette), both equipped with moulded gutters that drain overboard at the stern. Gutters also line the sides of the cockpit, so cleaning fish guts is a breeze (the carpet's easily removed – do so before your start fishing). For cleaning fish detritus from yourself – there's a hand-held fresh water shower (hot and cold), as well as a transom hand basin.

And when exhaustion overcomes you after fighting that marlin for six hours, refreshment is close at hand from the built-in, cockpit refrigerator (port). Steps lead up to the side decks (port and starboard), and a gleaming stainless steel and teak staircase (offset to port) takes you up to the flybridge and the helm station.

If anything, the flybridge is an even more attractive area – an elegant blend of finger-tip controls and expansive settees. The helm station has two, padded swivel seats – nice to have a friendly companion while steering – and positioned at the rear of the flybridge, the helmsman has an excellent view of the fish-fighting action behind him, making it easy to work in sync with those handling the rods.

Forward of the helm station is an area designed for socializing – and I'll confess it's my favourite spot on the boat. It features surround settees (easily seating 10), a fridge, a basin (hot and cold water), more storage lockers, weatherproof speakers and 360-degree views. When the weather turns iffy, the flybridge can be enclosed with clears.

Far from feeling excluded, the helmsman's possie ensures he's right in the mix – and if he gets bored with the conversation, can entertain himself with the joystick (bow thruster), Furuno chartplotter, Furuno autopilot – or simply caress the stainless steel wheel.

Down on the expansive foredeck, looking aft, the flowing lines of the M43 are accentuated by the stainless steel side rails, curved windscreen and scalloped side windows. She's a graceful boat.

#### Interior

It's a contemporary interior design, with plush, European-styled leather upholstery offsetting Nyotah cabinetry and thick carpeting. Double doors between cockpit and saloon fold open to provide good flow between the two areas. The saloon features an L-shaped settee on the starboard side (it folds out into a generous double bed) and a U-shaped settee and table to port.

The galley is immediately to port, just inside the cockpit doors. Compact but functional, it's equipped with a hardwearing, cherry timber floor (easy to clean) and all the gear required by those who actually know what they're doing when it comes to food preparation.

This includes a drawer dishwasher, electric hob, microwave oven, 150-litre fridge /freezer (to starboard), a moulded, polystone benchtop and basin with a single lever mixer. The M43 is equipped with 9kW Kohler genset, and 240-volt power points are scattered throughout the boat. A great feature of the galley is the large window in the rear bulkhead that functions as a serving hatch to those in the cockpit.

A sizeable liquor cabinet with glasses is built into the cabinet next to the fridge on the starboard side. And once you've poured the drinks, you can slip an appropriate CD or DVD into the player. The boat has three LCD screens – one each in the saloon and two cabins. There's air-conditioning throughout the boat, and plenty of headroom – even in the head.

#### Accommodation

A flight of steps leads down from the saloon into a central companionway and the sleeping quarters and bathroom – all sumptuous and spacious. The master cabin (in the forepeak) has a large, island double bed, with a matching pair of (hanging) lockers on either side. I particularly liked the lights inside the lockers – no more grappling for a clean pair of undies in the dark. More storage is offered in a huge drawer at the base of the bed.

Aft of the main cabin, to starboard, is a guest cabin with two single berths (generous width, one above the other). The lower berth converts into a double. Storage is provided in a cabinet with drawers. Directly across is the bathroom with two entrances – one from companionway, and one from main cabin. It's equipped with an electric toilet (the boat's fitted with a 120-litre holding tank), a separate shower with a retractable door, and a vanity. The clear glass basin on the vanity is very cool.

All in all – I'd call it a successful blend of sportsfishing and luxury boating – and judging from the interest so far, there's plenty of demand for that concept.

For the December launch, the boats were craned into the pool at the Gold Coast's Sanctuary Cove Resort, so taking the M43 and M37 for a spin wasn't really an option. But with the Oliver track record, it's safe to assume performance is a given.

So what's missing? Only one thing: outriggers. Doak says most buyers will probably elect to have some fitted, but it's wise to give them the option.

The M43 will sell for around NZ\$960,000 and the M37 for around \$650,000 mark. The former will be on display at next month's Auckland Boat Show in the Viaduct Basin.